

# The News & Observer



A map provided by the protesters show the route of the proposed natural gas Atlantic Coast Pipeline would take through the state. Chris Seward [cseward@newsobserver.com](mailto:cseward@newsobserver.com)

## Editorials

### Needed scrutiny of the Atlantic Coast Pipeline

By The Editorial Board

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The Atlantic Coast Pipeline will face many hurdles from gaining permits to burrowing through 600 miles of terrain from West Virginia through Virginia and North Carolina. But its biggest obstacle may be time.

The project is already more than a year behind schedule and now faces further delays as it waits for environmental permits. The project's backers don't like it, but the delays are a helpful test. If the project is truly needed, time should make that clearer. If it's not – as many argue – then time will reveal that as well.

The N.C. Department of Environmental Quality has caused the latest regulatory delay. The department has presented the utilities developing the pipeline – Charlotte-based Duke Energy and Richmond-based Dominion Energy – with a fourth round of questions about the economic benefits and environment risks of the project. The developers plan to answer quickly but DEQ could take up to 60 days to review their response.

This is not a case of regulatory foot-dragging. DEQ is being deliberately thorough – and perhaps properly skeptical – about how much of an environmental risk the project poses and whether the benefit to the public justifies it. It's an especially welcome thoroughness after the industry friendly attitude of former Gov. Pat McCrory's DEQ appointees. If McCrory – a former Duke Energy employee – had won re-election, it's fair to assume that the utilities wouldn't be getting multiple requests to explain the risks and value of a project.

It's a good thing that DEQ under Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper is asking a lot of questions. This project certainly raises them. The most practical ones involve the pipeline's impact on several hundred streams, creeks and other bodies of water it will cross. There is also a need for more detail on the developers bold, but not necessarily substantiated claims about economic benefits the project will bring to economically depressed areas it will pass through in eastern North Carolina. Finally, there's an issue of where it will end. It's supposed to end in Robeson County near the North Carolina's southern border, but some pipeline officials have suggested it may eventually go into South Carolina.

There's no doubt North Carolina needs reliable sources of energy, but there is doubt about whether it needs a massive new pipeline carrying natural gas from fracking operations in West Virginia and Pennsylvania. Whether it does will become clearer as DEQ and the public has time to assess the environmental and economic impacts of the Atlantic Coast Pipeline.